**The Election of 1824**

In the judgment of many historians, Adams' presidency was doomed to failure because of the manner in which he gained the high office. Adams never lived down the charge by his leading opponent that he had secured the necessary majority in the House only by agreeing to a "corrupt bargain," by which Adams allegedly rewarded Henry Clay with the post of secretary of state—then the stepping stone to the presidency—in return for Clay's intriguing and manipulating in the House to switch votes to Adams.

The fascinating presidential election of 1824 was a turning point in many ways. It followed a succession of three two-term presidents, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe—the famous "Virginia Dynasty"—each of whom was identified with Jefferson's Republican party. Monroe had run unopposed in 1820, for the Federalist party of Washington, Hamilton, and John Adams had finally given up unable to shake off the popular belief that, in opposing the War of 1812, it had come close to treason.

Even before the disintegration of the Federalist party, the Republicans had the presidential field pretty much to themselves. Party members in Congress would meet in closed caucus to name the candidate for the forthcoming presidential election.

As Monroe's second term approached its end, the Republican congressional caucus by an almost unanimous vote recommended William H. Crawford of Georgia, Secretary of the Treasury in Monroe's cabinet, as its candidate for president. But a number of other men, Republicans all, sensing that the caucus selection could this time be successfully opposed, threw their own hats into the ring. John Quincy Adams was one of this ambitious group of four men.

By 1824, Crawford's rivals were skeptical toward caucus selection. Adams, in his diary, had come to believe that

"a majority of the whole people of the United States, and a majority of the States [were] utterly averse to a nomination by Congressional caucus, thinking it adverse to the spirit of the Constitution and tending to corruption."

Adams was no doubt sincere in his insistence but he must have known that there was no such chance of him being nominated. Motivated by soaring ambition, he sought to convince himself that he was breaking with tradition only for the loftiest and most principled of reasons. The other contestants simply saw their chance to win.

Adams' several rivals constituted one of the most impressive collections of politicians that ever vied for the presidency in any single election. In addition to Crawford, the group included:

* John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, the brilliant Yale-educated nationalist who served as secretary of war under Monroe;
* Henry Clay of Kentucky, the master politician who had been the chief architect of the Missouri Compromise; and
* General Andrew Jackson of Tennessee, a man of slight political achievement, little education, and notorious temper, but widely admired for his exploits as an Indian fighter and above all for his stunning victory in 1815 over the British at New Orleans.

Withdrawing from the race when it became clear that he had no real chance to win, Calhoun and his backers settled for second place under the presidency of either of the two leading candidates—Adams, the only northerner in the competition, and Jackson, the darling of the South and West.

The election returns make clear how decisively the Adams and Jackson outdistanced Crawford and Clay.

The tallies were as follows:

Candidate Popular vote % of total Electoral vote % of electoral vote

Jackson 153,544 44 99 38

Adams 108,740 31 84 32

Crawford 46,618 13 41 16

Clay 47,136 13 37 14

Since no candidate had won the required majority of electoral votes, the choice was turned over to the House of Representatives, in accord with Article II of the Constitution. Since, by Article XII, only the top three vote-getters qualify in such a circumstance, Clay's name was dropped from the list. Since Crawford had become physically incapacitated (from a stroke) and unable therefore to perform the duties of the high office, there was very little chance that any in Congress would join the diehards ready to stand by Crawford.

In his diary entry for 9 February 1825, Adams wrote,

"May the blessing of God rest upon the event of this day," for earlier that day,

Adams had been selected by the approving vote of thirteen states, with Jackson supported by seven states and Crawford by four.

Three weeks and two days later, Adams reported that he had suffered through two sleepless nights prior to inauguration day. His excitement and unease were induced not only by the fact that he was about to assume the great burden of the presidency but by the vilification that the Jacksonians had heaped on him for what they claimed were the sordid means by which he had won the election to the office in Congress